



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Plant a Phobl Ifanc
The Children and Young People Committee**

**Dydd Iau, 9 Hydref 2008
Thursday, 9 October 2008**

Cynnwys
Contents

- 3 Ethol Cadeirydd Dros Dro
Election of a Temporary Chair
- 4 Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions
- 4 Ymchwiliad i'r Cynllun Gweithredu Rhianta
Inquiry into the Parenting Action Plan
- 31 Cynnig Trefniadol
Procedural Motion

Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg. Mae hon yn fersiwn ddrafft o'r cofnod. Cyhoeddir fersiwn derfynol ymhen pum diwrnod gwaith.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included. This is a draft version of the record. The final version will be published within five working days.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Eleanor Burnham	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Angela Burns	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Nerys Evans	Plaid Cymru (yn dirprwyo ar ran Helen Mary Jones) The Party of Wales (substitute for Helen Mary Jones)

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Lucy Akhtar	'Sdim Curo Plant! Children are Unbeatable!
Ann Crowley	Plant yng Nghymru Children in Wales
Jacqui Donovan	Rhwydwaith Rhieni Caerffili Caerphilly Parent Network
Ann Fritter	Rhwydwaith Rhieni Caerffili Caerphilly Parent Network
Tony Ivens	Plant yng Nghymru Children in Wales
Simon Jones	'Sdim Curo Plant! Children are Unbeatable!
Siân Northey	Rhwydwaith Rhieni Caerffili Caerphilly Parent Network

Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

Tom Jackson	Clerc Clerk
Rita Phillips	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Kathryn Potter	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil yr Aelodau Members' Research Service

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 10.50 a.m.
The meeting began at 10.50 a.m.

Ethol Cadeirydd Dros Dro
Election of a Temporary Chair

[1] **Mr Jackson:** Good morning, and welcome to the Children and Young People Committee. Unfortunately, Helen Mary Jones is unable to be here today. Therefore, under Standing Order No. 10.19, I call for nominations for a temporary Chair.

[2] **Angela Burns:** I nominate Nerys Evans.

[3] **Mr Jackson:** Thank you. Are there any further nominations? I see not. Nerys Evans is therefore elected temporary Chair of the committee.

*Penodwyd Nerys Evans yn Gadeirydd dros dro.
Nerys Evans was appointed temporary Chair.*

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[4] **Nerys Evans:** Thank you for nominating me as temporary Chair. I welcome everyone to this meeting of the Children and Young People Committee. As you know, the Assembly works bilingually, so Members and witnesses may speak in English or Welsh. Headsets are available for translation and amplification.

[5] Gofynnaf i bawb ddiffodd eu ffonau symudol, BlackBerrys, *paggers*, neu unrhyw declynnau electronig eraill. Nid oes larwm tân wedi ei drefnu ar gyfer y bore yma, felly, os bydd un yn canu, bydd angen inni ddilyn y tywyswyr allan o'r adeilad. A yw unrhyw Aelod eisiau datgan buddiant? Gwelaf nad oes.

I ask everyone to switch off their mobile phones, BlackBerrys, pagers, or any other electronic devices. We are not expecting a fire drill this morning, so, should a fire alarm sound, we will need to follow the ushers out of the building. Does any Member wish to declare any interests? I see that you do not.

[6] Yr ydym wedi cael sawl ymddiheuriad ar gyfer cyfarfod heddiw. Fel y clywsom, mae Helen Mary Jones yn ymddiheuro na all fod yma i gadeirio'r pwyllgor; yr wyf yn dirprwyo ar ei rhan hi. Yr ydym hefyd wedi cael ymddiheuriadau gan Christine Chapman, sy'n cadeirio pwyllgor gweithdrefn arbennig y Cynulliad o dan Reol Sefydlog Rhif 25. Bydd hwnnw'n cyfarfod drwy'r dydd heddiw, fel y bu'n gwneud dros y dyddiau diwethaf. Yr ydym hefyd wedi cael ymddiheuriadau gan Lynne Neagle, sydd ar gyfnod mamolaeth, yn ogystal ag Ann Jones, sydd fel arfer yn dirprwyo ar ei rhan. Ni all Ann fod yma oherwydd ymrwymiad yn ei hetholaeth. Yn anffodus, mae'r Blaid Lafur wedi methu â darparu dau ddirprwy, felly dim ond y tair ohonom sydd yma heddiw.

We have received several apologies for today's meeting. As we heard, Helen Mary Jones apologises that she cannot be here to chair the committee, and I am substituting on her behalf. We have also received apologies from Christine Chapman, who is chairing the special Assembly procedure committee under Standing Order No. 25, which is meeting all day today, as it has been doing over the past few days. We have also received apologies from Lynne Neagle, who is away on maternity leave, as well as from Ann Jones, who usually substitutes for Lynne. Ann is unable to be here because of a constituency commitment. Unfortunately, the Labour Party has failed to provide two substitutes, so we are down to three Members today.

10.53 a.m.

Ymchwiliad i'r Cynllun Gweithredu Rhianta Inquiry into the Parenting Action Plan

[7] **Nerys Evans:** Croesawaf y tystion i'r pwyllgor: Lucy Akhtar o Plant yng Nghymru, Tony Ivens o Plant yng Nghymru, Ann Crowley o ymgyrch 'Sdim Curo Plant!, a Simon Jones, hefyd o 'Sdim Curo Plant!. Diolch i chi am ddod heddiw, a diolch am eich tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig yn ymateb i alwad y pwyllgor am dystiolaeth.

Nerys Evans: I welcome our witnesses to committee: Lucy Akhtar from Children in Wales, Tony Ivens, from Children in Wales, Ann Crowley from the Children are Unbeatable! campaign, and Simon Jones, also from Children are Unbeatable!. Thank you for coming, and for your written evidence responding to the committee's call

for evidence.

[8] Atgoffaf Aelodau mai dyma'r cyfarfod cyntaf inni glywed tystiolaeth lafar ar gyfer ymchwiliad y pwyllgor i sut mae Llywodraeth y Cynulliad wedi gweithredu ei gynllun gweithredu rhianta. Cylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad hwn yw craffu ar waith Llywodraeth y Cynulliad ar ei gynllun gweithredu rhianta rhwng mis Rhagfyr 2005 a mis Mawrth 2008. Byddwn hefyd yn craffu ar yr hyn y mae Llywodraeth y Cynulliad yn parhau i'w wneud yn y maes hwn, a pha adnoddau sydd ar gael. Bydd y pwyllgor hefyd yn cymryd tystiolaeth am yr hyn sy'n gweithio a'r hyn nad yw'n gweithio yn y maes hwn, ynghyd â'r hyn sydd angen ei wneud i symud yr agenda hon yn ei blaen.

I remind Members that this is the first evidence-gathering session for the committee's inquiry into how the Assembly Government's parenting action plan is being implemented. The remit of the committee's inquiry is to scrutinise the work of the Assembly Government on its parenting action plan between December 2005 and March 2008. We will also be scrutinising what the Assembly Government is continuing to do in this area, and what resources are available. The committee will also be gathering evidence on what works in this area, what does not work, and which actions are required to take this agenda forward.

[9] Gwahoddaf y tystion i wneud cyflwyniad byr cyn i'r Aelodau ofyn eu cwestiynau. Dechreuwn gyda chynrychiolwyr Plant yng Nghymru.

I invite the witnesses to make a brief presentation before Members ask their questions. We will start with the representatives of Children in Wales.

[10] **Ms Akhtar:** Thank you. We are going to do our presentation as a double act. Tony will look at the background to the parenting action plan, I will look at the current situation, and then Tony will say what Children in Wales thinks should be put in place for the future.

[11] **Mr Ivens:** I thought that it might be useful to explain the background to this briefly. Back in 2004, Children in Wales published a document called 'Raising our Children with Confidence', and we had two ambitions for that document. First, we hoped that it would provide some sort of strategic, co-ordinated, coherent approach that would overcome the problems of education doing one thing, health doing another, and social care doing something else, and pull everything together under one umbrella. That, for obvious reasons, would avoid duplication, identify gaps, and act as a focus for the development of new pieces of work.

[12] Secondly, as you know, we are a membership organisation, and we had a lot of input from various individuals representing various voluntary organisations who wanted to see specific pieces of support put in place. That was our ambition, and that was where it came from. We took it to the Minister, who was Jane Davidson at that time, and she was very supportive. The information that we had from the Minister was that, unfortunately, there would not be sufficient resources available to implement a full strategy, but she was happy to implement an action plan, which, hopefully, would be achievable with the level of resources available. That is how we, as a steering group, came to produce the action plan, which I am sure you have all seen. That was in 2005.

[13] **Ms Akhtar:** As you can see from our written response, many of the action points in the parenting action plan—although we had hoped for a full strategy—were not met. Even those action points that were met did not make the significant impact that we had hoped for. For example, although a lot of professionals are trained by the Incredible Years Wales programme, they are not necessarily delivering that training, for one reason or another.

[14] The current service is far from universal and tends to be in geographically specific areas of disadvantage. It is available in a crisis through referral or as a result of a parenting order, and that tends to stigmatise parenting support; it makes it look like you get it only if

you are a parent who has big problems. Provision is also very patchy, with significant gaps for black and minority ethnic communities, teenage parents, parents who have disabled children or who are disabled themselves, and fathers. Even the patchy support that is available is not always accessible due to a lack of transport, particularly in rural areas, childcare issues and costs.

[15] There is no all-Wales co-ordination of what is going on with parenting. Tony and I, who are both part time, are the only real, all-Wales co-ordinators. We hoped that the parenting action plan would help to achieve more co-ordination, but that, largely, has not happened. Even within different Welsh Assembly Government departments, there is not always co-ordination. For example, if something is happening in social justice, the children and families division will not always be aware of that.

[16] Our networks have helped to provide some co-ordination. We have Fforwm Magu Plant, a parenting co-ordinators' network, and Fatherhood Wales, and that brings together practitioners who are working across Wales. So, some co-ordination has come out of that.

[17] Even though the parenting action plan has finished, we are disappointed that the Welsh Assembly Government is still referring to it. For example, in the 'Stronger Families' consultation document that has just been published, the parenting action plan was referred to as the document for parenting support and co-ordination. Some authorities are trying to provide co-ordination and some have a strategy and a parenting co-ordinator, but that is not universal. Some authorities have parenting networks, and I believe that you will hear evidence from Caerphilly Parent Network later on. Those networks have been strong in the authorities, where they exist.

11.00 a.m.

[18] The other thing that did not come out of the parenting action plan was the national occupation standards for work with parents. Those were launched in 2005 by Jane Davidson. In England and Northern Ireland, the Governments put funding into testing and trialling the qualification of that occupational standard, but, in Wales, no money or co-ordination was put into it. As far as I know, no-one has taken up that qualification, and so it has fallen by the wayside.

[19] However, I would like to finish on a positive note. One action point that was carried out was the publication of a series of booklets for parents. We will be launching one in a couple of weeks' time, which is a booklet for professionals and working fathers. I have brought copies for you today. Tony will now tell you what we think should be in place for the future.

[20] **Mr Ivens:** This March was the end of the three-year period of the plan, and we had a meeting with Jane Hutt, who was very positive and made a commitment to an ongoing parenting action plan. However, in the subsequent meeting that we had with officials, it became apparent to us that there was a pretty much total lack of resources available to deliver anything. We took the view that the best interests of children and young people would not be served by producing a document without any resources to back it up. Bearing in mind that this committee was new and was about to sit, we thought it best if we took a gap year, effectively, and looked at the findings of this committee. That was done in the hope that some resources would be available in the next financial year, and so we are looking to move it forward in 2009. At the moment, we are in a state of stasis, and we have no parenting action plan.

[21] To share a couple of points about our current situation, Lucy mentioned the fact that, although training is being delivered by the Incredible Years Wales programme, it is not always matched by service provision. It is also probably worth mentioning some of the things

that we feel the Assembly Government could have delivered that did not have a cost implication. The work with parents in relation to schools has not moved forward at all, simply because no identified lead has been forthcoming from the Assembly Government. When it comes to knowing who has responsibility for that, we are no further forward now than we were back in 2003, when the process started. We recommended such things as using a common assessment tool for programmes, which would avoid the cost of independently evaluating each programme. There has been no movement on that either. So, we are at a stage where we have had three years of this, and we have to be honest and say that we are disappointed by what has come out of those three years. Much as we would like to move things forward, we are reluctant to do so without a commitment of some level of resource to make it happen.

[22] **Nerys Evans:** Dywedodd Angela ei bod eisiau gofyn cwestiwn, ond hoffwn gymryd tystiolaeth gan ymgyrch 'Sdim Curo Plant! cyn inni ddechrau gofyn cwestiynau. Gofynnaf i Ann a Simon wneud cyflwyniad byr, felly.

Nerys Evans: Angela indicated that she would like to ask a question, but I want to take evidence from the Children are Unbeatable! campaign before we start asking questions. So, I ask Ann and Simon to make a brief presentation.

[23] **Mr Jones:** Thank you for inviting us today to provide evidence on behalf of Children are Unbeatable! Cymru. For those of you who may not be aware of us, we are an alliance of more than 400 organisations working in all the nations of the UK, which include Save the Children, which Ann represents, and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which I am representing today. The aims of the Children are Unbeatable! alliance are to provide children and young people with the same legal protection from being hit as adults, and to promote positive and non-violent discipline.

[24] We would like to say at the outset how disappointed we are that another opportunity was missed yesterday at Westminster to vote for, or even to debate, an amendment to the Children and Young Persons Bill to provide that equal protection. There is increasing movement across Europe: 17 of the 27 European Union nations have banned or are on the road to banning physical punishment for children. Only last week, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child said yet again that the UK was failing to meet its commitments under the convention by not changing the law. We would like to express our disappointment on that.

[25] As you know, as Wales does not have the powers to enact legal change on this, as a steering group, we have concentrated on our latter aim of promoting positive and non-violent discipline and achieving cultural change.

[26] As outlined in our evidence, we welcome the principled stand taken by the Welsh Assembly Government and the National Assembly as a whole on a number of occasions in supporting legal change, and the support that we have had from the Minister and individual Assembly Members for the campaign. This has placed Wales at the forefront of the Children are Unbeatable! campaign.

[27] In terms of promoting non-violent discipline, it was indicated to us that the parenting action plan would be the main vehicle for achieving this. Children are Unbeatable! Cymru also received direct funding, which bolstered agency funding from the Welsh Assembly Government between 2004 and 2008, to appoint a co-ordinator to look at how we could feed into this process.

[28] As Lucy and Tony have indicated, we welcome the booklets that have been produced, particularly the booklet on alternatives to smacking, which has been a useful tool for professionals. To supplement that, we also commissioned independently to look into what a

public education campaign would look like in Wales. We have a number of recommendations, which, I believe, were attached to the back of our evidence. We were directed again towards the parenting action plan and the group that had been set up to co-ordinate this as the key driver for getting this public education campaign around non-violent methods of discipline off the ground. Unfortunately, that did not happen.

[29] Further to that, in 2007, with the support of the Welsh Assembly Government, we produced a ‘help at hand’ toolkit for professionals, which provides exercises to do with parents and carers looking at methods of non-violent parenting. It is an online toolkit that is very accessible, and was launched in the Senedd in December 2007.

[30] I do not want to cover any of the areas that Tony and Lucy have covered—their response was very comprehensive—but I think that while there have been positives to the parenting action plan, certainly in raising the profile of parenting as an issue, Children are Unbeatable! Cymru feels that there has been a missed opportunity to put the key building blocks in place to support positive parenting and begin to get that cultural change around non-violent discipline. We find it particularly concerning that, as Tony highlighted, the lifespan of the action plan has now expired and we are kind of left hanging; there is nothing to replace it. Therefore, the question is where do we go from here, and how will the Welsh Assembly Government make that commitment to positive parenting and equal protection for children and young people a reality when we currently do not have a strategy?

[31] **Nerys Evans:** Diolch yn fawr. Awn ymlaen yn awr at gymryd cwestiynau oddi wrth yr Aelodau. Soniasoch chi, Angela, eich bod yn dymuno gofyn cwestiwn. **Nerys Evans:** Thank you. We will now move on to take questions from Members. Angela, you indicated that you would like to ask a question.

[32] **Angela Burns:** I am going to ask a completely different question from anything that we thought of earlier. If we had the funds, would you be content to put them behind the current parenting action plan, or would you want to see these 10 points—a substantial number of which have not been delivered in any useful format—to be completely rewritten? That is, would you be happy to carry on with this plan, or would you like a new one?

[33] **Ms Akhtar:** We had a manifesto in place before the current parenting action plan was written, which was asking for more universal service. As there was no money, the parenting action plan came out of that. We would love all of those action points to be met, but we would also like a bit more. It is slightly greedy, but what came out of the action points in the parenting action plan was still not a universal parenting service. It was still a case of having a little bit here and there. We have provided you with copies of the manifesto. Our vision was to have something universal for all parents; therefore, if you have a problem, you know exactly where you can go at the earliest stage. It is universal, from the antenatal stage until your children are in their teenage years. That was our vision of what we wanted.

[34] **Angela Burns:** It is an admirable vision. Unfortunately, universality is an exceptionally expensive business. I was not around then, therefore I am making a big assumption, but given that I assume that the 10 action points were a distillation of everyone’s main hopes and wishes the last time around, which of these 10 points do you think have been delivered satisfactorily?

11.10 a.m.

[35] **Mr Ivens:** We are very pleased to have seen the booklets come out. That is the one thing that stands out as a commitment in the action plan that has been met. In terms of the other action points, we have been disappointed.

[36] **Ms Akhtar:** The training for Incredible Years was delivered, but it has not resulted in parenting groups taking place. That is because the people who were trained in the programme, for example health visitors, were not necessarily released from their jobs or did not have experience of working with groups, so they were a little hesitant about running groups. So, for whatever reason, many people were trained, but that has not resulted in parenting groups taking place, not least because many professionals did not always feel that Incredible Years, although it is a very good programme, was the right programme for the parents that they had at that time.

[37] **Angela Burns:** Ann or Simon, do you want to come in on that?

[38] **Ms Crowley:** On the action plan and the 10 points, we would want to see something more specific about public education. The Assembly Government and the National Assembly have taken a good, positive stance as far as we are concerned on the issue of equal protection, and stated that they want to concentrate on what they can do, rather than on what they cannot, which is great. However, on promoting positive parenting and supporting parents to develop alternative ways of disciplining, they are not doing as much as they should be. We would like, within any new action plan, a specific point about communicating public education, which I do not think has to cost that much. There is much more that the Assembly could do across all departments and divisions to support parents in general and to behave in particular ways. It would cost some money, but I do not think that it would be an awful lot.

[39] **Ms Akhtar:** Quite a lot is being spent on the other end, when the parents get to the crisis point. It takes longer for that to come through, but a great deal is spent on children in care and on parenting orders, and so on, so perhaps a lot more could be spent on the prevention side.

[40] **Angela Burns:** The reason why I am pushing on all of these action points and the gaps within the parenting action plan is that if, by some twist of good fortune, there was suddenly a load of money available, what I do not want to see happen—it happens an awful lot in government circles—is for everyone then to disappear for a year and a half and write a brand new action plan that is yet down the road. Can we still pick this action plan up, dust it off and put some money behind it?

[41] I note that the working group to consider the Beth Johnson Foundation report made 18 recommendations and the Welsh Assembly Government has decided not to proceed with any of them. My first question, therefore, is: what is the point of setting up the working group if you are going to take no notice of it? However, can you expand on this and on what you think that we need to do to involve grandparents in parenting, because that is one of the important elements of this parenting action plan?

[42] **Mr Ivens:** I sat on that Beth Johnson working group. We know, anecdotally and from a large body of research, that when parents are struggling with their children, the first place that they go before they even consider approaching services is to their own parents. So we know that grandparents have that crucial role when families are struggling. We know that we live in a somewhat different world now from the world in which some of those grandparents were parenting their own children. We also know that the age of grandparents is dropping for demographic reasons, and yet the amount of support available to grandparents is virtually nonexistent. Many of the programmes that are out there, run by Children are Unbeatable!, the NSPCC and Action for Children, would welcome grandparents, but none of those programmes are designed for or marketed at, if that is the right phrase, grandparents. So, there is no support for them. That, basically, was the thrust of the findings of the working group.

[43] **Angela Burns:** All my questions are on this point, so I will just rattle through them. Did you want to add anything, Ann or Simon?

[44] **Mr Jones:** From the point of view of Children are Unbeatable!, there is a generation gap in parenting. Parenting has changed, and even in the last five to 10 years, there has been quite a change in people's attitudes towards physical punishment. Younger parents are now much more on board with the campaign, although older parents are struggling with it. Grandparents are another generation again, so any public education or any targeted information needs to encompass the whole family, and the variety of different carers that may be involved in a young person's life. We should acknowledge the sensitivities around challenging some of the parenting techniques that grandparents perhaps used to use with their children. That challenge is inherent in what we need to see happening.

[45] **Angela Burns:** I want to ask about the national bilingual helpline. In answer to the question, 'Has it been delivered?', we got a resounding 'no'. I find that extraordinary, given that we live in a bilingual society. What are your views on that? How important is it?

[46] **Mr Ivens:** It would certainly be a valuable resource, and we were delighted when the original commitment was made to set up a bilingual helpline. The reasons why it has not happened are complicated. My understanding is that they rest on responsibilities outside of those enjoyed by the Assembly Government. I think that it has to do with money coming from Westminster—that was my understanding. Although there was a commitment to set-up costs, there was also an ongoing cost. There seemed little point in setting up something for six months and then closing it down again. So, the absence of long-term funding has resulted in the telephone helpline not being set up. However, we absolutely applaud the idea of a bilingual telephone helpline; something like 11 per cent of Parentline's calls come from Wales, but it is unable to offer its service through the medium of Welsh.

[47] **Ms Akhtar:** If you are stressed, you want to be able to speak in the language that you are most comfortable with.

[48] **Nerys Evans:** A oes gan Ann neu **Nerys Evans:** Do Ann or Simon have Simon unrhyw beth i ddweud am y cwestiwn anything to say on the question of the ynglŷn â'r llinell cymorth? helpline?

[49] **Mr Jones:** The evaluation of the Help at Hand week in Llansawel indicated that we need a menu of options for parents to access help. Some will want to access a helpline, while others prefer a face-to-face approach. Some might want advice anonymously, because they are worried about how people will perceive what they are saying. Others want someone to be there in person, to say that it is okay and they should not worry. At the NSPCC, we have had experience of providing advice to parents and carers through a helpline. So, it is about providing a menu of options for parents, and the key message is that it is okay to say that you do not know what to do. No-one is born with an inherent ability to parent, and that is where we are in this country—people are frightened of saying that they need help, or that they do not understand something, because they feel that statutory agencies will be involved and the children might be taken away from them. However, it is the most normal thing in the world for a parent not to know what to do—all parents get to that point. So, part of it is about what services are available, and part of it is the ethos that we have as a society about people asking for help.

[50] **Angela Burns:** That leads me on nicely to the tenth action point that has not been delivered, which is the ParentsNet website. As the parent of two very young girls, I know that they only have to fall over in the garden for me to decide that they have meningitis. I spend half my life on the NHS Direct website. If we had been able to deliver ParentsNet, would it have been a useful tool, or would the target audience not necessarily be so web-savvy?

[51] **Ms Akhtar:** That goes back to your point about cost. A website need not cost very

much. When you look at the current Welsh Assembly Government website, there is no mention of parents. There is a lot of talk about the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and children's rights in general, but even on the children and young people page, parents are not mentioned. However, the Assembly Government has produced quite a lot of resources—we have brought some of them along—which could be put in one place for parents to access. There is a lot of guidance on helping children at school, and a range of material on the basic skills side, and all that could be brought together. Not all parents will want to look at it, but it need not cost that much to set up. As Simon said about the menu of options, it need not cost that much to put it all together in one place.

11.20 a.m.

[52] **Mr Ivens:** The key point is probably that one size does not fit all; we need different services to meet the needs of different parents.

[53] **Angela Burns:** I have one more question on the gaps. Action point 7 states that framework partnerships will be required to consider the needs of parents and carers in their planning. What is all that about?

[54] **Ms Akhtar:** It is about consulting parents when you provide services.

[55] **Angela Burns:** It is not an action, though, is it? I come from the old school, where an action was a tactical objective that you undertook and achieved. I do not understand how that could be an action. What did you understand by it?

[56] **Mr Ivens:** I think that that action point came about as a result of a discussion that we had. In England, there is a parenting fund, which is a substantial sum of money that is ring-fenced to deliver support services for parents. As that parenting fund does not exist in Wales, the point that we were trying to make is that we should ensure that the framework partnerships consider parents' needs, even though that money is not specifically ring-fenced for parenting.

[57] **Nerys Evans:** Ann a Simon, a oes gennyh unrhyw beth i'w ychwanegu ar y pwynt hwnnw? **Nerys Evans:** Ann and Simon, do you have anything to add on that point?

[58] **Ms Akhtar:** Nac oes.

Ms Akhtar: No.

[59] **Nerys Evans:** A oes gennyh gwestiynau pellach, Angela, ar y pwnc hwn? **Nerys Evans:** Do you have any further questions on this subject, Angela?

[60] **Angela Burns:** No, I am happy with that for the moment, Chair.

[61] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am an imperfect parent of grown-up kids. I passionately believe that parenting is one of the biggest issues in contemporary society. I speak as a former magistrate; I have also sat on mental health tribunals and have worked with older disadvantaged, underachieving kids. I think that this is a travesty. If you had a magic wand, what sort of funds would we be talking about? Has anyone ever done a logical study about the preventative work that you, quite rightly, allude to? What moneys could be saved at the other end of either the judicial system, when youngsters enter it, or even care?

[62] **Mr Ivens:** I cannot give you figures off the top of my head. I know that some research has been done in England to look at this, and I know that it proved to be cost-effective. However, I am afraid that I cannot give you numbers.

[63] **Ms Akhtar:** I think that Barnardo's also did a similar piece of work, looking at the costs throughout a child's life.

[64] **Eleanor Burnham:** Could that be sent to us?

[65] **Ms Akhtar:** We will dig it out for you.

[66] **Eleanor Burnham:** Thank you. I think that it is an important issue, because, as you quite rightly said earlier, there is a great cost attached to care, prisons—you name it—that results from a lack of good parenting. I was heartened, but quite upset, by a visit to a parenting co-ordinator in one school in north Wales at the end of the recess. The poor woman was at her wits' end. She was doing a very good job, but had limited resources. She felt the same as you do.

[67] **Nerys Evans:** If there is evidence, could you please supply us with a copy?

[68] **Ms Akhtar:** Of course.

[69] **Eleanor Burnham:** That would be very good.

[70] **Ms Crowley:** I have never seen any evidence about parenting, but there is evidence from Barnardo's about the cost of not ending child poverty, which is estimated to be £40 billion per year.

[71] **Eleanor Burnham:** It is not just about vulnerable, poorer families. We live in a very complex society.

[72] **Ms Crowley:** However, as a researcher, it would be hard to identify what you mean by not having parental support. Many parents get support informally.

[73] **Eleanor Burnham:** I think that you have misunderstood my question. Has anyone done a piece of work on the cost of care, the cost of prisons, and everything else, which would be incurred as a result of a lack of good parenting, and supporting parents?

[74] **Ms Crowley:** I know, but I am asking how you would identify what you mean by that support. Many parents get support without reference to anyone. You would not be able to capture that.

[75] **Ms Akhtar:** Another problem is that you cannot do a randomised control. There have been studies of individual parenting programmes and the level of improvement parents feel to their situation by having gone on a parenting programme; there are individual studies to look at that.

[76] **Nerys Evans:** Do you have copies of the Barnardo's studies?

[77] **Ms Akhtar:** Yes.

[78] **Nerys Evans:** If you could supply them to the committee, it would be useful.

[79] **Eleanor Burnham:** Thank you, Chair. The Incredible Years programmes are obviously a very good thing; what views do you have on these? You have already given us strong general views on parenting action, but what views do you have on the Incredible Years programme in particular? You have mentioned health visitors, for example. Page 4 of the research that I have here says that the investment could be wasted if action is not taken to resource the delivery of the parenting programme at a local level. You have already said a

little on that, but could you please expand on what you said?

[80] **Ms Akhart:** Incredible Years is an effective programme in that much research has been done on it. A recent study in north Wales looked at the Incredible Years programme.

[81] **Eleanor Burnham:** Where was that done in north Wales?

[82] **Ms Akhart:** It was done by Bangor University. I cannot remember which local authority it was, but I would be happy to forward that information to you.

[83] **Nerys Evans:** If you could supply that information, it would be fantastic.

[84] **Ms Akhart:** Yes, of course. Those research programmes do not necessarily take account of the parents who drop out of the course; it is quite a long course and not all parents are ready to turn up to groups and to stay in a 10, 12 or 14-week course. Some local authorities find that if they do other programmes either instead of, or as well as, Incredible Years, they get different parents. This relates to what Simon said about providing a menu of different programmes—different programmes suit different parents and different facilitators. Not all facilitators who are comfortable delivering Incredible Years—

[85] **Eleanor Burnham:** Is this done in Communities First areas and within the Communities First programme?

[86] **Ms Akhart:** No, it is Flying Start.

[87] **Eleanor Burnham:** Okay, fine.

[88] **Mr Ivens:** I would like to make one last comment that is not, in any way, critical of Incredible Years. Of the large-scale academic evaluation of the Incredible Years that was carried out last year, 99 per cent of it was conducted with mothers. It is evaluated as being effective with mothers, but there are no data on how effective it is with fathers.

[89] **Eleanor Burnham:** That is an interesting point, which I picked up from the parenting co-ordinator in the school that I alluded to earlier. She was only working with young girls, because it was hard to work with young fathers. That is an interesting issue.

[90] **Mr Ivens:** Absolutely.

[91] **Nerys Evans:** Ann or Simon, do you have anything to add to that?

[92] **Ms Crowley:** It is quite a formal programme, but it is strongly validated in terms of being seen and proven to be effective. We did some research in Llansawel—a community in Briton Ferry in Neath Port Talbot—around two years ago where we evaluated what worked in terms of supporting parents to bring up their children in a way that did not involve smacking or physical violence. We found that it did not work to bring in parents to be talked to about not smacking their children; that is fairly obvious I suppose. What worked was supporting parents through much more ordinary parenting programmes, such as drop-in and open access family centres and so on, part of which would be about how they disciplined their children and nutrition and so on. That is how parents changed their behaviour. On the earlier discussion on universal versus targeted—I appreciate that money is an issue in terms of universality—one of the problems is that parenting programmes, apart from in youth justice, are voluntary. If we end up targeting just a few parents, even the most needy, they become stigmatised and many parents think, ‘Oh God, we are not going to go to that’, and that is not very attractive.

[93] **Nerys Evans:** Would you be able to provide us with evidence of that study in Briton Ferry?

[94] **Ms Crowley:** There was an appendix on that in our evidence, but I can send you the bigger report if you wish.

[95] **Nerys Evans:** Yes, thank you.

[96] **Eleanor Burnham:** Do you think that that information is easily available to parents? We were talking about such information being available on the internet earlier, but not every parent has access to the internet. Is the information understandable? Where are the gaps? If there are gaps, how would you improve things?

[97] **Mr Ivens:** May I quickly come back to the Incredible Years? That programme was not written for parents of older children; it was written for, and is effective with, parents of younger children. So, when we look at issues of parenting and anti-social behaviour orders or youth justice, Incredible Years was not intended to be appropriate in those circumstances, so we have a massive gap in service provision. We do not have an equivalent evaluated and validated programme for parents of teenaged children. We know from talking to a range of parents over the years that many parents struggle with their children when they get to the teenage years.

11.30 a.m.

[98] **Eleanor Burnham:** There was a programme the week before last about two youngsters who had been sent away to Ghana for the week. I do not watch a lot of television, but it was very effective in this particular instance. There was a girl and a boy—a teenager—and the mother, in one instance, could not even rouse the teenage boy, whereas when they went to Ghana, they were with a very strict Ghanaian lady who got them working. They obviously saw poverty as well, and that was a shock. Perhaps we should take up all those kinds of things.

[99] **Nerys Evans:** Simon or Ann, would you like to come in on that point?

[100] **Ms Crowley:** To answer the other question—

[101] **Nerys Evans:** Yes, to answer the original point.

[102] **Ms Crowley:** As Lucy and Tony have said, I think that the booklets are good. Simon also mentioned that there is a booklet for parents on alternatives to smacking. From the perspective of Children are Unbeatable!, we would like to see the messages put out more publicly. This is the whole idea of some sort of public education strategy, so that we have messages going out to parents in the same way as we do about putting on your seatbelts and not drinking and driving. We would like to see it being treated as a public health issue. I do not think that we could call for expensive television adverts, because of the money, but—

[103] **Eleanor Burnham:** They have had an advert for taking up the immunisation against cervical cancer.

[104] **Ms Crowley:** Yes. We would like to see something like that, so that the information gets out there in a way that is useable and accessible and is around for more parents. I do not know whether Lucy has anything to add on the booklets, but the distribution has been a bit of a problem. In theory, the one on alternatives to smacking is meant to go out at a particular time through health visitors, but I know that there have been problems and not all parents have received them. It was not working, but I do not know whether that is still the case.

[105] **Ms Akhtar:** I am not sure. The other thing—sorry, Simon; did you want to come in?

[106] **Mr Jones:** I was just going to say on the back of that that if you look at the countries that have banned physical punishments, after the ban has come in there has to be a couple of years of public education before the ban can actually take effect. If the Welsh Assembly Government's position is that it is in favour of equal protection and if it had the powers to do so it would ban it, we would want to see those couple of years of public education beginning now, in a build up to a ban being introduced at Westminster or in Wales.

[107] Ann is right about bringing in the other campaigns. There was a campaign around the impact of second-hand smoke on young children, with the smoke being blown out of the children's mouths, and seeing that had a huge impact on a lot of people who were smoking around children. The impact on some of these children and young people who have experienced physical punishment is not just physical hurt, but emotional hurt. They articulate that that is equally powerful. We want the groundwork to be put in now, working towards a ban, so that there is a momentum and so that people no longer use physical punishment any more.

[108] **Ms Akhtar:** On the other point, obviously booklets are great, but not everybody's literacy skills are strong enough—

[109] **Eleanor Burnham:** Their linguistic skills—

[110] **Ms Akhtar:** Yes. I think that it has to be a twin-track approach of following various avenues to provide information through different sources.

[111] **Mr Jones:** On something like the physical punishment that we were talking about earlier, the banning of physical punishment does scare parents and often they will read the booklet and still think, 'No, I am not sure about that'. Sometimes they need somebody to talk them through exactly what it would mean and why it is positive as well. It comes back to a multimodal approach really.

[112] **Nerys Evans:** On that point on physical punishment, I am sure that you followed the debate that we had in the Proposed Vulnerable Children LCO Committee about whether the powers should be in the Assembly or Westminster. What is your view on that?

[113] **Ms Crowley:** I was also an adviser to the Welsh Affairs Select Committee during the debate on that issue. I am not a lawyer. My personal views, and the views of Save the Children, are that it would be great if that could happen. I am not a lawyer and it is obviously a new settlement. It is interesting that the whole issue about smacking children caused such a furore between the two institutions and has been testing out the new devolution arrangement. It is a shame and I would like to see the Assembly being able to make laws in that area.

[114] In fact, when the UK Government and the devolved administrations were up in front of the UN committee a couple of weeks ago for this periodic report—I was not there, but a colleague of mine was—I understand that the committee asked the head of the England delegation, if you like, or Whitehall's children and young people's unit, why responsibility for physical punishment and youth justice was not given to the Assembly for its Members to do as they want with it. What is the problem?

[115] **Nerys Evans:** Tony or Lucy, do you have any comments on that point? Do you think that the Assembly should have the powers, as a point of principle, to decide whether to ban smacking children?

[116] **Ms Akhtar:** Yes.

[117] **Mr Ivens:** I agree with the last two comments, but it must be recognised that, along with the ban, sufficient resources need to be made available. With regard to Simon's comments about parents being scared, if we are to persuade parents and make the case to them, we need to offer them alternative strategies, and that will require resources.

[118] **Angela Burns:** If we have finished with that point, I would like to go back to your interesting comment about the difference by gender in the take-up of the various services offered. Given your experience of working with fathers, what gaps are there, and what can we do to fill them? I appreciate that that is a lengthy question.

[119] **Mr Ivens:** I was just about to say. How many hours do we have?

[120] **Angela Burns:** Please answer as briefly as you can.

[121] **Mr Ivens:** We have good-practice models for working with fathers. There are projects out there at the moment in which people do good work, successfully engaging with fathers. So, we have the models to deliver this.

[122] **Angela Burns:** May I interrupt you just there? I would be interested to know whether we as a committee might look at the work of any of those models or visit them.

[123] **Mr Ivens:** We were pleased to have funding from the Assembly to commission a set of guidelines for professionals. Those give examples of good practice, and they are in the packs that we have for you. I would also be more than happy to facilitate some visits for you if you want to visit some fathers' groups.

[124] **Nerys Evans:** Do you want to carry on where you left off now?

[125] **Mr Ivens:** Yes, briefly. There are two sides to this. As well as a commitment to engage with fathers on the ground, we also need to be mindful of how our services are constructed. The Care Council for Wales's mapping came out last year, which showed that 99 per cent of the childcare workforce is female. We need to address the gender segregation within the childcare workforce, because that will provide male role models for children.

[126] **Angela Burns:** That is such a good point, and more and more, there is a shortage of male role models in primary schools, too.

[127] **Mr Ivens:** Absolutely. We have high separation, do we not? We have a lot of young people living in single-parent families, and male role models are absent. Where such role models cannot be found in the home, I suggest that they should be found in schools and childcare services.

[128] **Nerys Evans:** What is the first step towards addressing that, in your opinion?

[129] **Angela Burns:** Do you think that men do not want to do the job?

[130] **Mr Ivens:** No, I do not think that that is true at all. A cultural change is needed. Traditionally, it is not seen as a profession that boys are encouraged to enter on leaving secondary school. That is wrong. There is no reason why that should be so. Under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, we have a duty to promote gender equality, and there are organisations that have taken that message on board and looked at how they recruit staff. Where they have listened to the views of men within their areas, they have been successful in recruiting men to services.

[131] **Ms Akhtar:** Pay is an obvious factor, as the pay for childcare is quite poor. Even among girls, it is considered as an option for those who have not done very well. ‘Why do you not go in for childcare?’ It is still seen as a cinderella career to go into.

[132] **Nerys Evans:** Ann and Simon, do you have anything to add to that?

[133] **Ms Fritter:** I support Lucy’s remarks. It is a very low-valued occupation. It is lowly paid. I am not so sure about teaching, actually. That is not in the same position.

[134] **Mr Ivens:** That was my point, actually.

[135] **Ms Fritter:** Yes, so there must be different factors at play. However, there is a crisis in getting anyone to work in parenting support and childcare provision, because pay is low and the conditions are quite difficult. It is easier if you have your own young children and you are a mum who is staying at home to look after them, as you can broaden that arrangement to look after others. It is not easy, but perhaps it is seen as the norm. However, until it is seen as more of a profession in its own right with decent pay and conditions, I do not think that we will get men—or enough women.

11.40 a.m.

[136] **Angela Burns:** May I ask a tiny supplementary question to that before I go on to ask about the other gaps? It is probably a slightly controversial question, but do you think that adults are becoming frightened of dealing with children and of being involved in dealing with children? I am asking because so much aggro seems to go with the job—and I do not mean aggro from the children, but from the state: red tape and the fear of being accused of acting inappropriately. It is almost irrelevant whether you are male or female. When I go around my constituency talking to young people—and I mean older teenagers, not young children—they tell me that they feel as though society treats them with fear, suspicion and dislike. Do you think that that is a growing trend, or culture? Could it deter people from going into the profession?

[137] **Mr Ivens:** It is certainly true of men entering the childcare profession. There is peer pressure, and they fear that they will somehow be seen as strange or will be accused of being a paedophile, but there is no evidence to support that. Just because you are a man working in childcare, it does not mean that you are a paedophile. We are seeing changes within society, but policy is not keeping up with those changes. The amount of childcare carried out in the home by men has increased by some 800 per cent over the past decade or so. The data of the former Equal Opportunities Commission, now the Equality and Human Rights Commission, consistently show that around a third of all childcare in the home is done by fathers. We are talking about hands-on childcare, not a Saturday afternoon trip to the park. Those changes are occurring within society, but they are not reflected at the level of the professional services that we offer.

[138] **Mr Jones:** To come in on that point, the NSPCC has done some work on proportionate safeguarding and has looked into that as a particular issue because of people’s fears. The abduction of a child is still a rare occurrence; we know that most children are abused by those who are known to them, within or very close to the family group. Stranger danger was drilled into us at school, but we need to look at the percentages of what actually happens and the perception of society that it is a stranger, usually a male, who will abduct a child. That just does not match the figures in reality. So, there is a need to do some myth-busting out there and to look at the proportionate safeguards, because it is about managing risk. We need parents to be completely aware of the risks, as well as children and young people so that they know how to prevent themselves from being put in those situations. Sadly,

we also know that there are predatory adults out there who seek to target organisations that do not have safeguards in place. They seek to bend regulations to get access to children, and, in Wales, perhaps more so than the other countries in the UK, we have seen the tragic results of institutionalised abuse. So, a balanced approach is needed, and we all need to consider it, from the Government, to the voluntary sector through to society.

[139] **Angela Burns:** We talked about the gaps in provision for fathers, and you also mentioned gaps in provision for older and teenage children, parents with a disabled child, parents who have a disability and black minority ethnic parents. In your experience, what are the most significant gaps and how could we best plug those?

[140] **Mr Ivens:** I would argue that the list that you just read out includes the most significant gaps. They are all significant and important.

[141] **Ms Akhtar:** There are projects for teenage parents. There is a very good project in Wrexham that is mostly for young mums but it also tries to involve the fathers, about being given a proper education. However, many of the projects for teenage parents do not give them an aspiration to continue their education; it is a stop-gap provision. Childcare is still a real issue for teenage parents.

[142] **Angela Burns:** This is my last question, which I direct to the representatives of Children are Unbeatable!, as they provided us with a list of recommendations. We have talked about this issue quite a lot. Am I right to say that these recommendations have gone nowhere, or have they been enacted in part?

[143] **Ms Crowley:** You are right to say that they have gone nowhere. We were told by the Minister that they could be taken forward in the context of the parenting action plan and the steering group. However, I believe that that was about halfway through its life—at the beginning of last year. We were represented on that group, but nothing happened.

[144] **Angela Burns:** Thank you for your frankness.

[145] **Eleanor Burnham:** The written consultation responses mention that lessons need to be learned from elsewhere; the England-only National Academy for Parenting Practitioners has been mentioned as an example. Is there any assessment of how Wales compares with England in offering support for parenting, and what are your views about linking to that academy or creating a separate one in Wales?

[146] **Mr Ivens:** The anecdotal feedback on parenting support received from professionals across the board is that we in Wales see ourselves as the poor relations when compared with England. The general feeling is that a far higher level of resources is made available to England than to Wales.

[147] I think that a parenting academy would benefit Wales. However, I do not think that there is the need for an academy on exactly the same scale as that in England, as we are a much smaller nation and have smaller numbers. However, there is a need for a hub, or a focus on what is out there, to act as a point of reference in developing new services. We would all agree that we should not be complacent about what we have at present, and that we need to move these things forward. So, there is an important role for that kind of central body, or hub, or whatever you want to call it.

[148] **Ms Akhtar:** There is some disappointment in Wales that many training courses, and so on, are held in England but people in Wales are unable to attend them, as the remit is for England only. So, even if people are prepared to travel, they are not allowed to benefit from the things that are coming out of the parenting academy.

[149] **Eleanor Burnham:** I suspect that many people living on the border, as I do in north-east Wales, would know what is going on a few miles across the way, which often causes tension.

[150] **Ms Crowley:** That sounds ridiculous, does it not? [*Laughter.*]

[151] **Mr Jones:** I will try to bring some positivity to this. The Welsh Assembly Government, the National Assembly for Wales, Welsh MPs, and individual Assembly Members have been at the forefront of the campaign for this change since it started. People working in the voluntary sector across the other nations look with envy at the support that equal protection gets in Wales. Interestingly, the NSPCC met with colleagues from the voluntary sector in Scotland, and they were really interested to see how this parenting action plan was being delivered. However, they were hugely disappointed when I had to say that we do not really feel that it is being delivered. Therefore, there are some positives. Unfortunately, despite the support and the intention, the disappointment is because that intention has not been realised, or not to the extent that we would like to see, for the benefit of children and parents.

[152] **Eleanor Burnham:** Is that because of a lack of funding?

[153] **Mr Jones:** Yes.

[154] **Ms Crowley:** I would be interested to hear what Tony and Lucy have to say. However, I do not think that it is just a question of a lack of funding; this was pitched at a low level in Government. One suggestion that the Minister made to us, in front of her officials, was that the parenting action plan steering group could perhaps be the vehicle for taking forward the public education campaign on physical punishment, and maybe the steering group needed a more prominent chair. However, it was operating at a fairly low level in Government—and I am not putting down particular civil servants, but it came pretty low down in the pecking order. In addition to a lack of resources, that is a recipe for going nowhere.

11.50 a.m.

[155] **Mr Ivens:** I should say that I jointly chaired that group. [*Laughter.*]

[156] **Eleanor Burnham:** Should we move on to the next question?

[157] **Ms Akhtar:** Tony may have chaired the group, but he does not hold the purse strings or have the power to encourage people to get behind this.

[158] **Eleanor Burnham:** We must get over this *Yes, Minister* moment. [*Laughter.*]

[159] **Mr Ivens:** May I make one positive comment? It reflects on your earlier question and on the situation in England. The lack of resources is indicative of the priority that parenting enjoys in England compared to Wales. We are fortunate that our young people are not being stabbed on the streets in Wales, and I would not for a moment want to see that. However, there is a case for ensuring that preventative services are in place to ensure that that does not happen in the future.

[160] **Eleanor Burnham:** I suppose that we can say, from the evidence that we have heard, that there has been a low level of sympathy in society towards children. When my kids were little, there were no ramps to help parents with pushchairs. Thirty years ago, it was frowned upon if parents went to a restaurant with children—God forbid that you should do so.

However, if you look at Italy, and other continental European nations, they have a culture of readily accepting children—far more so than us. I am sure that we will change as we become more European.

[161] The Welsh Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Education in Wales stated in written evidence that a renewed parenting action plan is not necessary. They say that we need to assess the extent to which the action plan has been met, and determine whether extra resources are needed to implement outstanding actions. Do you agree with that? I suppose that you have already told us, really. However, do you think that a revised action plan is necessary, and, if so, what should it focus upon?

[162] **Ms Akhtar:** We would only want a revised action plan if it had money and clout behind it. What we do not want is a similar action plan, with lots of action points that go nowhere, so that nothing happens. One supporting point that I would make about civil servants is that some of those working on the parenting action plan have huge portfolios that include Flying Start and all sorts of other programmes. It is therefore not surprising that the parenting action plan did not become a high priority.

[163] **Eleanor Burnham:** In my naivety, before I looked at all these ‘starts’, I assumed that parenting was the focus. If you look at Home Start, which was a voluntary activity, parenting was the priority.

[164] **Mr Ivens:** It was the core business.

[165] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes. I was at a Home Start meeting recently, and it was evident that that is still its core business. I would therefore have expected all the other ‘starts’ that came after to be the same.

[166] **Ms Akhtar:** Then we need someone with a co-ordinating role across all those different activities.

[167] **Eleanor Burnham:** Across all the different ‘starts’.

[168] **Ms Akhtar:** Yes.

[169] **Mr Ivens:** This comes back to my initial comment, by way of explanation, that we need some kind of strategic cohesion to pull everything together, rather than the current disparate situation.

[170] **Eleanor Burnham:** With Home Start, for instance—and you know more about it than I ever will—it seems to me that there are charitable organisations doing their best, but my question to them when I visited was how they linked up with all the other ‘starts’ that the Government has introduced. It is all a crazy hotch-potch, with bits and pieces being done here and there. Do you agree with that? Do we need a strategic approach?

[171] **Mr Ivens:** Yes, absolutely—and that is a role for the Assembly Government, and for the National Assembly for Wales as well.

[172] **Eleanor Burnham:** We will point that out in our report, because you have pointed it out to us.

[173] **Ms Akhtar:** The issue cuts across the Assembly Government’s different departments—for example, the Department for Social Justice and Local Government, and the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills. Both departments do bits of parenting work, but there is no co-ordination.

[174] **Eleanor Burnham:** What form of strategic action would you like the Assembly Government to take?

[175] **Mr Ivens:** I would like the Assembly Government to ensure that this all comes under a single umbrella. Lucy just gave the example of social justice—we had lobbied, as part of the parenting action plan, for other programmes in addition to Incredible Years to be evaluated. Although everyone supported that view, there was no money in the pot to do it. Then, completely out of left field, we were told that Strengthening Families was being evaluated by the social justice department. The officials in DCELLS knew nothing about it; the left hand was not talking to the right hand.

[176] **Nerys Evans:** Ann and Simon, do you have anything to add to that?

[177] **Mr Jones:** I have briefly read the consultations on the 22 children and young people's plans, for my sins, and I support completely what Tony has said about the need for strategic direction. It may well have been mentioned—I would be happy to be proved wrong—but I cannot remember seeing anything about non-violent discipline in a single plan. There is lots about domestic abuse and concern about the impact of living in abusive situations on children. Equal protection is mentioned in the Welsh Assembly Government's domestic abuse strategy, and we are pleased that that has been taken on board, but there is nothing that specifically says, 'We will, through parenting programmes, seek to reduce the level of the use of physical punishment'. It may well be in some of them, because seven core aims in 22 plans is a lot to try to remember in one go, but, to me, that shows that if the Welsh Assembly Government is serious about making this change in society—it will be a cultural change—it needs to be embedded somewhere, and from our point of view, it needs a plan.

[178] **Eleanor Burnham:** In many respects, if you could dovetail all of these things, you would work smarter and much more effectively and probably reduce costs as well as raise effectiveness.

[179] **Mr Ivens:** Not all these things have cost implications, for example, we talked about evaluation tools. As part of the action plan, Jayne Isaac worked on an excellent document about parent participation, it was a really good piece of work—

[180] **Eleanor Burnham:** Do we have a copy of that?

[181] **Mr Jackson:** Not to hand.

[182] **Mr Ivens:** It is an Assembly Government document.

[183] **Nerys Evans:** We can circulate a copy.

[184] **Mr Ivens:** That document went out to all the framework partnerships as guidance, but we have not had any feedback on it and the partnerships are not required to provide feedback. It is all very well putting stuff out there, but we need to know whether it is working on the ground.

[185] **Nerys Evans:** Symudwn at ein cwestiwn olaf ar eich cyfer y bore yma. Bydd eich tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig a'ch tystiolaeth llafar yn ffurfio rhan bwysig iawn o'n hadroddiad, ond i gloi, a oes dau neu dri argymhelliad sylfaenol yr hoffai Plant yng Nghymru a 'Sdim Curo Plant! inni eu
Nerys Evans: We move to our final question for you this morning. Your written and oral evidence will form an important part of our report, but, to conclude, are there two or three basic recommendations that Children in Wales and Children are Unbeatable! would want us to include in our report?

cynnwys yn yr adroddiad?

[186] **Mr Ivens:** In line with the Assembly's seven core aims for children, I would argue that we can only offer the best possible outcomes for our children and young people by offering adequate support to their parents. Children and young people's start in life is, to a large extent, fashioned by the amount of support and the nurture that they receive in their families and in their homes. If I had to give a single recommendation, it would be that this needs to be seen as a greater priority and to be adequately resourced.

[187] **Nerys Evans:** Since Tony has given one, do you want to give another, Lucy?

[188] **Ms Akhtar:** Returning to the point that we made before about leadership, real leadership on parenting is needed. I would stress the importance of it, as Tony said, and of co-ordinating what is happening across Wales, with someone mapping what is going on, to see what gaps exist, and to provide leadership and co-ordination.

[189] **Ms Crowley:** There should be some kind of parenting support strategy or action plan and part of that should include designing and implementing a public education strategy on positive parenting and the non-use of violence against children in the home.

[190] **Mr Jones:** This is more of a concluding comment. We have really welcomed and benefited from the support of the Welsh Assembly Government in terms of Children are Unbeatable!. The question from our point of view is where we go from here and what the next step is. As we saw with the legislative competence Order, if Wales is unable to legislate on this at this stage, what is the commitment? Without an action plan and a strategy in place, we are left in a position where we are doing little bits and pieces that do not fit into anything coherent. So, an action plan is crucial.

[191] **Nerys Evans:** Thank you very much, as I mentioned, for your written evidence and for taking the time to attend today's committee meeting. Your evidence will form an invaluable part of the committee's work. Committee members, we will now take a break before the next evidence session.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 11.59 a.m. a 12.06 p.m.
The meeting adjourned between 11.59 a.m. and 12.06 p.m.*

[192] **Nerys Evans:** Good afternoon. I formally restart the meeting and welcome Jacqui Donovan, Siân Northey and Ann Fritter from Caerphilly Parent Network. The Assembly operates bilingually, therefore the headsets are available if you require translation.

[193] Diolch i chi am gymryd yr amser i ddod i gyfarfod y pwyllgor heddiw. Dim ond tair Aelod sydd gennym, yn anffodus; mae dwy Aelod yn methu â bod yma. Diolch am eich tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig. Gallwch gymryd ein bod oll wedi ei ddarllen ac y byddwn yn gofyn cwestiynau yn seiliedig arni. Felly, diolch am y gwaith a wnaed gennych wrth baratoi'r dystiolaeth ysgrifenedig, ac am eich amser heddiw. Gofynnaf i'r tair ohonoch wneud cyflwyniad byr ac yna cawn gyfle i ofyn cwestiynau gan fod gennym ryw hanner awr i wneud hynny.

Thank you for taking the time to attend today's committee meeting. Unfortunately, we only have three Members here today; two Members are unable to be here. Thank you for your written evidence. You can take it for granted that we have all read it and that we will be asking questions based on that evidence. Therefore, thank you for the work that you have done in preparing your written evidence, and thank you for your time today. I will ask the three of you to make a brief introduction and we will then have an opportunity to ask questions as we have around half an hour to do so.

[194] **Ms Fritter:** Fy enw i yw Ann Fritter ac y fi yw cydlynnydd Rhwydwaith Rhieni Caerffili. Yr wyf wedi ymgymryd â'r swydd hon ers rhyw bum mlynedd.

Ms Fritter: My name is Ann Fritter and I am the co-ordinator of Caerphilly Parent Network. I have been in post for some five years.

[195] **Ms Northey:** I am Siân Northey. I am the project assistant of Caerphilly Parent Network and I have been in post for some three years.

[196] **Ms Donovan:** Hello. My name is Jacqueline Donovan. I am a parent representative for the Caerphilly Parent Network.

[197] **Nerys Evans:** I will kick off the questions. To what extent do you think that the Assembly Government has provided a coherent strategic lead on parenting in Wales?

[198] **Ms Fritter:** I feel that the parenting action plan was a good starting place for that. The only concern that I have, possibly, is the fact that it has not been given quite the degree of significance that it should have at the children and young people's framework partnership level. I think that was possibly due in part to the single plan and the children and young people's plan coming on board, and that taking on some of the key issues in the core aims. Also, there is Cymorth and the objectives in the Cymorth plan. The parenting action plan was good in drawing out some of the key issues around parenting involved in the children and young people's plan and the Cymorth plan. However, as the work was being done in any case, I think that the parenting action plan may have been seen as a document that could be referred to but possibly not one to work with. Many parents whom we spoke to did not actually know about the parenting action plan, which, I guess, was no big surprise. I think that the parents felt that it was good that there was such a document available and that parenting itself was being taken into consideration and being given a profile within strategic planning. Therefore, I think that they felt that that general recognition of parenting and the issues around parenting was something that they were pleased to see, even if they had not been necessarily aware that it was going on.

[199] **Nerys Evans:** Do you have anything to add to that?

[200] **Ms Northey:** The parents whom I spoke to were generally of the opinion that service availability had increased for them and that there was more out there for them, with more booklets and so forth available.

12.10 p.m.

[201] **Angela Burns:** Thank you for coming to talk to us about this issue. To recap, there is a good feeling that the Welsh Assembly Government is taking 'Parenting Positively' as a key way forward. However, there is a slight disappointment that, perhaps, some of the local organisations have not taken it on as a strong product that they could use; you said that some of the parents did not even know about it and so on. Can you say briefly what has been the positive impact of the parenting action plan in Caerphilly?

[202] **Ms Fritter:** A great deal of the work was being undertaken in other areas, so I would possibly question whether the parenting action plan has actually been a key driver. Cymorth was a key element in the services for parents and has developed some of the developments around parenting. Flying Start is something else that was put into the pot and that has developed things such as the Webster-Stratton parenting programme and some of the parenting programmes linked in with Flying Start. That will improve some of the services in some of the more deprived areas.

[203] **Ms Northey:** Some of the parents I spoke to were very happy with some of the

parenting programmes that they had received—I think that they were referring to ‘Parenting Positively’. They explained how it was helping in their lives and that it was good being listened to by people whom they felt were non-judgmental. There was fear about the fact that, if they accessed help, social services might get involved and that it might lead to their children being taken away, so it was not always seen as a positive step.

[204] Other issues that they brought up had to do with the booklets, such as *Over the Top Behaviour in the Under 10s* and *From Breakfast to Bedtime*. Some of the parents commented on how good these booklets were and that, although they may not refer to everything all of the time, they kept the information at the back of their minds and that it was like a top-up. So, after completing a parenting programme, information such as this was another add-on and the booklets kept the information fixed in their minds. However, some other parents said that they did not even remember receiving these booklets.

[205] **Angela Burns:** So it was hit and miss?

[206] **Ms Northey:** Yes.

[207] **Angela Burns:** We see the parenting action plan as something that should have universal appeal, so that any parent should be able to access elements of the parenting action plan to help them with parenting. However, I got the impression—and I want to ensure that I have the right impression—that it seems to be targeted at certain kinds of parents who already have an awful lot of other interventions going on.

[208] **Ms Northey:** That can be true.

[209] **Angela Burns:** So it can be a case of an information overload.

[210] **Ms Donovan:** A great deal of information could be available in a different format. Many of the people with whom we deal, in the areas where we live and work, are deprived. The literacy levels are very low and people’s soft skills are very low. To use the internet, as an example, people might say, ‘We have 17 computers in our local library.’, but there are certain people who will not go into the library for various reasons. In some cases, their children have been thrown out of the library so they will not go in, and they will not go into schools. They cannot read and they will not go to basic skills lessons, so there are huge barriers to even reading a leaflet.

[211] **Angela Burns:** Do you have any views on how we could reach those people?

[212] **Ms Donovan:** Through things such as DVDs, generally.

[213] **Ms Northey:** We were also asking about parent.net; it was going to come online, but it did not happen. Although we acknowledge that not every parent would be able to access the internet, it would have been very useful for us to have the parenting information, legislation and the policies available on this issue, which we could perhaps look at, break down and disseminate. When you consider the Family and Parenting Institute and Parentline Plus websites, with regard to the information provided for parents, you are not quite sure what applies in Wales. So, it can be difficult for organisations such as ours to get the information out there, even if it is not first-hand experience, and sharing information can be difficult because there is nothing available.

[214] **Nerys Evans:** Are there any mechanisms at present for sharing information between organisations?

[215] **Ms Fritter:** No; not that we are aware of. Obviously, there are the partnership

meetings.

[216] **Ms Northey:** There are some things on a local level.

[217] **Ms Fritter:** I do not think that there is a conscious process at the moment.

[218] **Angela Burns:** You talked about parent.net; the other point from the parenting action plan that has not been delivered is the bilingual helpline. Can you express your views on that? Do you think that we still need it or do you think that we have too many helplines?

[219] **Ms Donovan:** I think that people who are hard to reach, have literacy problems, have a lack of soft skills and confidence and have low self-esteem—and we have an abundance of them in the Valleys—will not pick up the phone and ring helplines. They do not have home phones; they have mobiles. Even if it states that it is a freephone number, they may not see that and they will not ring because they are frightened that it will cost them a fortune. Sadly, they also think that those sorts of things are not for them but for other people.

[220] **Ms Northey:** Some people have suggested to me that a bilingual helpline would be useful, but they also said that they would not necessarily use it themselves. I took the consultation to one of my local groups, which is in a Welsh-medium school, and the people there said that it would be useful for those people whose first language is Welsh and who feel more comfortable when speaking Welsh. That was the only response that I had on that issue.

[221] **Ms Fritter:** I think that the point that Jacqui made is quite valid; it is all very well having a helpline but, quite often, the people who need help the most are the ones who do not have the necessary skills or do not feel comfortable picking up the phone. People need to be aware of the fact that the people who may phone the helpline are those who may have taken the information from the booklet or elsewhere. These issues need to be recognised.

[222] **Angela Burns:** My next question follows on from that. One of the key actions in the parenting action plan was to get a greater involvement from parents in the whole planning process. What are your views on how successfully that has been delivered as an action point?

[223] **Ms Fritter:** In Caerphilly, we are way ahead of the game in that sense because we have been up and running for around seven years. The whole parent participation agenda was pushed forward in particular in the guidance on parent participation that came out of the parenting action plan. We obviously linked in with other local authorities when they were developing their parenting participation processes, and we now host the meetings of the south-east network of parent participation officers on a quarterly basis. So, we have seen a huge change from there being only us originally and then Neath Port Talbot. There has been a huge increase in the work carried out by other local authorities on parent participation.

[224] The parent network has quite a good profile in Caerphilly. People come to us for consultations, to discuss parenting issues and to ask us to feed into their work. I represent the parent network on the children and young people's framework partnership, so the fact that we are engaged at the highest strategic level in Caerphilly in terms of children and young people is an indication of the work that is being done around parent participation and our profile in the county.

12.20 p.m.

[225] I think that there is a slight gap. We, as a parent network, do a lot of groundwork with parents. On a more strategic level, there is recognition that there needs to be parental involvement and that we can feed in at that level. There is a slight gap in the middle with regard to some service providers. Parent participation works on several levels. Perhaps there

needs to be more recognition among the service providers of the need to take on board the views of parents when they develop their services or even when they monitor and evaluate their services. We, in Caerphilly, were a bit ahead of the game with that. However, there has been an overall improvement in the general perception of parent participation and the understanding of the way in which the voices of parents need to be taken into account in policy and strategies.

[226] **Ms Northey:** I would like to add to what Ann has said. Parents' attendance at meetings is now well received. Our children and young people's partnerships have now folded, but we had a parent representative who sat on both of those partnerships as well as on several theme groups. So, we have parent representation as well as the work that we do scurrying around to represent their views.

[227] **Angela Burns:** Jacqui, I am interested to hear your view.

[228] **Ms Donovan:** I am lucky, because I sit on a number of committees, such as Communities First and steering groups: I know the jargon, I know the people, and therefore it is easy for me. However, this is not true for most. I find that many people would not attend a meeting where they would have any say at a strategic level; they would be too frightened to do so. We asked people to come today, but many could not get on a bus to leave their villages, so they would certainly be too scared to come here. It is nice to work with them on the ground, and then they can present their views to you. It is very important that, when you are dealing with people with a low level of literacy, for example, you do not speak in jargon, but act like a normal person and respect everyone. You will then get their views and can represent them. Hopefully, you can then feed back to them and tell them, for example, 'Things have improved; your little boy can get this.'. They then appreciate the services.

[229] **Angela Burns:** How do we get more of you?

[230] **Ms Donovan:** More of me?

[231] **Angela Burns:** Yes, because you are the parent who can relate to someone who struggles to communicate, and you have the vision, the commitment, and the ability to talk in this kind of setting with ease. How do we get more people to come on board to act as that interface? I totally understand people's reluctance to go through an organisation.

[232] **Ms Donovan:** The people who would be good in this role are perhaps parents who have given up work and have not worked for years. They would be good; they would be able to understand everything that is going on and would be a great asset, but they may have lost confidence because they have not worked. It is a matter of getting them along to meetings and cajoling them, empowering them, and giving them back their self-esteem. It would be a win-win situation for everyone if we could do that.

[233] **Nerys Evans:** Thank you.

[234] **Ms Fritter:** I would like to follow on from what Jacqui said. One of the strengths of the parent network is that we have a mechanism whereby we can bring parents in. For example, meeting structures can be intimidating for many parents. We recognise that, so, when we run events, we take a group of parents who do craftwork with the children. This means that the children are entertained and we have the parents for five minutes while that happens. That allows us to engage with other parents and provides those parents who would perhaps not participate or be engaged otherwise a comfort zone in which to engage with us.

[235] Once you start off and they start getting more comfortable with coming along to publicity events, you can nurture them a bit more, and ask them to attend a meeting. It is just

about identifying their self-esteem, confidence and their interests and building on those, by developing processes. Then, they might feel more comfortable attending one of our little meetings, which may be just an information session. We work closely with the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations, which puts on an enormous amount of training. We then work on committee skills and so on. For example, we will invite some parents to attend such training. It is about gradually building up their confidence and getting them involved. If you slip in the odd term, they start to get used to the terminology. So, it is a gradual process and is about taking the time to build relationships with parents to get them to a point at which they are happy to engage in a meeting. You have to build that into any type of work like this, but we do not always have the time.

[236] **Nerys Evans:** Jacqui, did you want to say something?

[237] **Ms Donovan:** Sorry, I have forgotten what I wanted to say.

[238] **Nerys Evans:** You are doing great work in this area.

[239] **Ms Northey:** It takes a long time to build up people's trust, and you have to allow them to participate at whatever level they are comfortable with. At the moment, we are running different types of groups in Caerphilly and we also go out into the community. Part of our consultation involved a behaviour support group, and another one that I was involved with was a sports club for children with disabilities. I just talked to the parents there. It just involved getting out and meeting parents. If they ask you for information, you have to be able to signpost them in the correct direction or find the information out for them. Often, people phone us up without having any idea what we do, but they have seen the word 'parent' in our title and they think that we might be able to help them. So, we get a varied amount of calls, and people often do not understand what we are about. However, if we cannot help them, we know someone who can. I do not know whether you will come to this later, but many of the parents to whom we spoke were not aware of the children's information service—

[240] **Ms Donovan:** I would not say 'a lot'; I would say that most had never heard of it. I have been to other areas of Wales, where it is advertised more effectively. There is no point in providing a service if no-one knows about it. What further confuses parents is the fact that it keeps changing its name. What is it called now?

[241] **Ms Northey:** Family information services.

[242] **Ms Donovan:** First, it was the children's information service, and now it is family information. If you want to get information out to the youths, you have to ring up family information, so that is a bit confusing.

[243] My other point was about choice. In the Valleys, people find it difficult to realise that they have a choice. When you tell them that they have a say and that they will be considered in the planning process, they do not think that that is the case, because they are so used to things being put in place for them. When you say, 'If you come along to meetings, you can have a say as a parent,' they do not see that; they see the Government doing something and it being given to them. So, they are hesitant and wary about why you are asking them to join in. It is difficult to get them to join in when they do not believe that what they have to say is taken on board.

12.30 p.m.

[244] **Eleanor Burnham:** Soniasoch am ddau grŵp arbennig yn eich tystiolaeth. **Eleanor Burnham:** You mentioned two specific groups in your evidence. You mentioned a lack of appropriate support and I

wyf yn meddwl i chi grybwyll pwyntiau am dadau ac amrywiaeth yn lefel y gefnogaeth sydd ar gael i rieni sydd â phlant anabl. A wnewch ehangu ychydig ar y diffygion hyn ac ar sut y dylai Llywodraeth y Cynulliad fynd i'r afael â'r materion pwysig hyn? Cyn i mi orffen, Siân, pam fod y bartneriaeth y soniasoch amdani wedi dod i ben?

think that you mentioned fathers and a variation in the level of support available to parents with disabled children. Will you expand a little on those gaps in provision and tell us how the Assembly Government should get to grips with these important issues? Before I finish, Siân, why was the partnership that you mentioned wound up?

[245] **Ms Northey:** That was the children and young people's partnership. Do you want to explain, Ann?

[246] **Ms Fritter:** I think that what has happened in Caerphilly is a general move. It is not about the children and young people's partnerships. The children's partnership as it stands and the young people's partnership as it stands are not going to work in the same way as they have been doing. They will be having wider network-type meetings as opposed to formal partnership meetings. That is because the decision-making process in the partnership structure has changed. Previously, some of the children's partnerships and young people's partnerships had decision-making powers, but those powers have now been elevated to just the framework partnership level. So, given that there were no longer any decision-making processes at that lower level, it was decided that maybe a wider network-type event would be more appropriate than just having a specific children's partnership and a specific young people's partnership. However, the children and young people's partnership is still in place in Caerphilly.

[247] **Eleanor Burnham:** Beth ydych yn ei ddweud am y diffyg cefnogaeth addas i dadau a hefyd i rieni plant anabl?

Eleanor Burnham: What do you say about the lack of appropriate support for fathers and also the parents of disabled children?

[248] **Ms Fritter:** Generally, there is a recognised gap in the support available to fathers. It is quite a difficult area to work in. It is easier to work with mothers, because you tend to see them at the school gate, but fathers might be at work or they might just not be there. The disparity of fathers makes them extremely difficult to engage with. I would not necessarily say that there is not the same recognition for working with fathers, but people still think that 'parent' equals a mother. When you are offering schemes for parents, you have to include the words 'and fathers' because, although that sounds obvious, people might not always include fathers in their definition of the term 'parents'.

[249] **Eleanor Burnham:** Wrth gwrs, mae llawer o dadau yn awr yn gweithio adref, er enghraifft, ac yn edrych ar ôl y plant tra bo'r fam yn mynd allan i weithio. Dyna ddywedodd un o'r tystion eraill wrthym, bod tadau'n un o bob tri gofalwr yn y cartref.

Eleanor Burnham: Of course, many fathers now work at home, for example, and look after the children while the mother goes out to work. That is what one of the other witnesses told us, that fathers are one of every three carers in the home.

[250] **Ms Fritter:** Nid yw'r gefnogaeth yno, yn anffodus. Yr wyf yn credu mai mamau sy'n mynd i grwpiau ar gyfer rhieni a'u plant bach ac nid wyf yn credu eu bod wedi'u sefydlu i ystyried anghenion y tadau oherwydd yr un—bydd rhaid i fi barhau yn Saesneg, sori.

Ms Fritter: The support is not there, unfortunately. I think that it is mothers who go to parent and toddler groups and I do not think that they have been set up to take on board fathers' needs because the same—I will have to continue in English, sorry.

[251] The relationships and activities that appeal to mothers might not appeal to fathers. If the statistics are that fathers now account for one in three of those who stay at home with the children we really need to look at how we engage with fathers and at the services that we

provide for them.

[252] **Ms Donovan:** Referring to the Valleys again, it is very difficult to get men into groups up there because of their macho image. I see men in my valley walking around with a baby in a pram, and then I will see another one and another one, but they never meet up because they will not ask for help. They will not go to the groups. They might feel that they would be laughed at by the women—or the other men who are there. I feel strongly about this. I am from Cardiff and, in Cardiff, men did go to groups much more. It is a very different type of man from those in the Valleys. When you bring people into groups, too much is made of trying to make a modern man out of a different type of man. In the city, you might get men to try new foods, or aromatherapy and all that, but not many of the rugby players in the Valleys tend to do those things. If you want to get more men in, you need to start pitching it on a sports level.

[253] **Eleanor Burnham:** Golf.

[254] **Ms Donovan:** Golf, rugby, or anything that they have in common that will bring them together. You have to realise that people in different places are totally different.

[255] **Eleanor Burnham:** Obviously, you are engaging on a very local cultural level, really.

[256] The other question is about the range of other barriers that you identify with regard to accessing parents. Do they include transport, because of the geography?

[257] **Ms Donovan:** That is a huge one.

[258] **Eleanor Burnham:** What about area-targeted services, which may exclude some parents, or a lack of accessible information? How do we overcome those barriers?

[259] **Ms Donovan:** We have a scheme in Caerphilly for free swimming—in the swimming pools, obviously. Areas such as Bargoed, Blackwood and Caerphilly all have pools, but where I live, for example, the village is 3 miles away from a pool. Someone who has three or four children, is unemployed and has to pay for the bus back, as it is too far to walk, will be excluded from that activity.

[260] **Eleanor Burnham:** Yes, I have asked constantly about the transport issue.

[261] **Ms Donovan:** It is a huge form of exclusion in small villages, definitely. The children do not tend to leave the village.

[262] **Eleanor Burnham:** What would be the cut-off point: 1 mile, or more than that? Would people be able to walk one mile, or would half a mile be the cut-off point?

[263] **Ms Fritter:** It depends on the individual, so you cannot be too prescriptive about it.

[264] **Eleanor Burnham:** I am asking what would be your expectation. You are talking about 3 miles, but people with families cannot walk 3 miles, given the state of the roads. In your experience, would half a mile be about the radius?

[265] **Ms Donovan:** If you have little children, then, yes, half a mile would be it.

[266] **Nerys Evans:** [*Inaudible.*]

[267] **Eleanor Burnham:** Fine. Okay.

[268] **Nerys Evans:** Do you have any more questions?

[269] **Eleanor Burnham:** I have a couple of questions.

[270] **Nerys Evans:** We have time for only one more.

[271] **Eleanor Burnham:** We have asked the other consultees about this, but, apparently, there is evidence of lessons learned from the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners in England, which, we have been told, has more money anyway. How well shared is any good practice that you are involved in across Wales? Would it be a good idea to set up a similar national parenting academy in Wales?

[272] **Ms Fritter:** Reflecting on what I said earlier about the support that we have had through the parenting participation officers. We had to extend those meetings from 2 hours to whole-day meetings because, as a forum, it was invaluable for discussing how we wanted to take things forward, share good practice and ideas, and develop our own services. Anything that is put in place for sharing good practice is useful for practitioners. It is nice to have that support as an officer, but it is also about sharing good ideas and good practice, what has worked and what has not worked. There is also strength in numbers. If there is anything particular that you want to lobby or drive forward, having it come from a group of you, or a national group, gives it more strength and potency.

[273] **Nerys Evans:** Mae eich tystiolaeth— a’ch tystiolaeth ysgrifenedig yn enwedig, lle mae’n amlwg eich bod wedi ymgynghori â rhieni a staff—yn hanfodol i’n gwaith. Pe baech yn gwneud tri argymhelliad inni fel pwyllgor, beth fyddant? Gan fod tair ohonoch, cewch un argymhelliad yr un. **Nerys Evans:** Your evidence—and your written evidence in particular, in which it is clear that you have consulted parents and staff—is intrinsic to our work. If you were to make three recommendations to us as a committee, what would they be? As there are three of you, you can have one each.

[274] **Ms Fritter:** In Caerphilly, we have been looking at developing a parenting participation strategy. That has been passed at framework level, so we will be working on it quite soon. We had a discussion beforehand about the fact that there has been a directive from the Assembly Government through the young people’s participation strategy, and each local authority had to have one of those in place. I do not think that the same thing has been done around the parent participation strategy. It would strengthen the whole parent participation agenda if there was more direction from the Assembly on that. Therefore, that is one of the key areas that I would like to see taken forward.

12.40 p.m.

[275] **Ms Northey:** I believe that parents want to be involved in the planning of services, at whatever level that they can participate, especially in schools, in order to feel comfortable about attending school and being a part of it, and just so that information gets out to them more freely. We know that it happens, but maybe it just needs to be spread around a bit more.

[276] **Nerys Evans:** Do you have one recommendation, Jacqui?

[277] **Ms Donovan:** I was going to say the same thing about schools. There should be more involvement. Many of the barriers are put up by the teachers, who say, ‘Leave the professional stuff up to the professionals’, but parents are not coming in to take over. Teachers want parents to enrich their children’s lives, but they want that to stop at the school door—it is a funny thing. There is good practice at a school in Llandaff North in Cardiff, where parents come in, and so on. Some schools get parents to come in to cook and help, and

so on, which I believe makes for a happier and more involved community.

[278] **Nerys Evans:** Diolch am yr atebion hynny. Gwn fod gan Eleanor rai cwestiynau ychwanegol i'w gofyn; a fuasech yn hapus pe baem yn eu hanfon atoch er mwyn cael eich atebion?

Nerys Evans: Thank you for those responses. I know that Eleanor had a few further questions; would you be willing for us to send you those questions so that we can have your answers?

[279] **Ms Fritter:** Yes.

[280] **Nerys Evans:** Diolch. Byddwn hefyd yn anfon cofnod o'r hyn a ddywedwyd yn y cyfarfod heddiw atoch. Diolch am eich amser, ac am ddod i'r Cynulliad; mae eich tystiolaeth yn hanfodol i'n gwaith.

Nerys Evans: Thank you. We will also send you a record of what was said in today's meeting. Thank you for your time, and for coming to the Assembly; your evidence is crucial to our work.

12.42 p.m.

Cynnig Trefniadol Procedural Motion

[281] **Nerys Evans:** I will now propose a motion to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting, to allow the committee to deliberate the content and recommendations of the draft report on child poverty. I propose that

the committee resolves to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting in accordance with Standing Order No. 10.37(vi).

[282] I see that the committee is in agreement.

*Derbyniwyd y cynnig.
Motion carried.*

*Daeth rhan gyhoeddus y cyfarfod i ben am 12.42 p.m.
The public part of the meeting ended at 12.42 p.m.*